



# MRCOG's VIEWS

*Mid-Region Council of Governments*

*Fall 2003, Volume 1, Issue 3*

## Making Regional Rail Real . . . Implementing Commuter Rail

This past August Governor Bill Richardson announced that he had dedicated \$2 million to implement commuter rail in the Belen to Santa Fe corridor. \$1 million was provided to the MRCOG to implement commuter rail between Belen and Bernalillo, and another \$1 million allocated to the New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT) to implement commuter rail between Bernalillo and Santa Fe. The Governor has dedicated an additional \$6 million through the recently-created GRIP program (Governor Richardson's Investment Partnership) to MRCOG for the capital costs of initiating the new rail service between Belen and Bernalillo. Although state funding is not expected to cover the full cost of the project, it will jumpstart the implementation of passenger rail service in this region and allow planning for the long term.

Since the announcement, MRCOG staff has been meeting with the NMDOT, Federal Transit Administration and other interested parties to discuss and resolve coordination and work plan issues. MRCOG staff has also generated a draft scope to address issues related to implementation. Some of the more important parts of this effort include:

- Generating an operating agreement with the BN&SF Railroad
- Identifying station locations
- Identifying other improvements to the transportation system to serve these stations
- Developing service schedule alternatives
- Assessing potential rider-ship

An integral part of this work will be involving each and every community along the corridor in a substantive decision-making process. Another dimension of this work will be identifying enhancements to the system over time. For example, an initial service scenario may include several stations that consist mainly of a platform and a parking lot. Over time, these platforms could become stations that are anchored by other supporting land uses and transportation services.

To help manage these efforts, the Governor has appointed a task force to provide feedback on the initiatives in both corridors, and the MRCOG Board of Directors has formed a task force to oversee the Belen to Bernalillo line. Questions or comments related to this activity can be directed to Mr. Chris Blewett (cblewett@mrcog-nm.gov) of the MRCOG staff. ■



## MRCOG Sets Legislative Priorities for the 2004 Session

MRCOG has identified several priorities for the upcoming legislative session that will begin on January 20, 2004. The 30-day session will be limited to issues concerning budgets, appropriations, revenue bills, and those issues chosen by the Governor for consideration.

On funding issues, MRCOG's top priorities include increased funding for the resolution of water issues through regional water planning, adjudication of water rights in the middle Rio Grande Basin, and the establishment of a long-term, permanent funding mechanism for water and wastewater projects. MRCOG will ask the Legislature to continue funding the state's seven COGs and to grant local governments additional tax authority to support public transit programs.

On policy issues, MRCOG opposes any changes to state revenue sources that will reduce revenue for local governments without compensating state funding or local taxing authority to offset revenue losses. MRCOG will also encourage the state to use existing regional service delivery systems whenever practical for the implementation of federal and state programs.

These legislative priorities are presented in their entirety on Page 4 of this newsletter. ■

# MRCOG Takes on Workforce Development Program Administration

## MRCOG's **VIEWS**

is published quarterly by the

**Mid-Region Council of Governments**  
317 Commercial NE, Suite 104  
Albuquerque, NM 87102-3429

www.mrcog-nm.gov  
Phone: 505-247-1750  
Fax: 505-247-1753

### Board Officers

John H. Hooker, Chair  
Mayor, Village of Los Ranchos  
de Albuquerque

A. Terese Ulivarri, Vice Chair  
Councilor, City of Belen

**Executive Director**  
Lawrence Rael

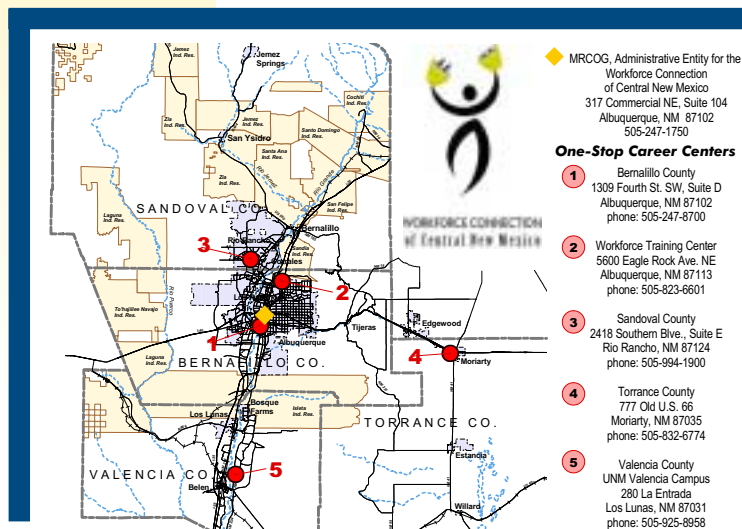
Effective July 1, 2003, MRCOG was selected through a competitive process as the Fiscal and Administrative Entity for the Workforce Connection of Central New Mexico (WCCNM). WCCNM is a workforce development program under the provisions of the Federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998.

WIA is intended to streamline services by consolidating more than sixty federal training programs through three block grants to the states: Adult Employment and Training; Disadvantaged Youth Employment and Training; and Adult Education and Literacy. Funding and decision making authority is transferred from the federal level to states and local areas. The goals of WIA are to:

- increase the employment, retention, and earnings of participants
- increase occupational skill attainment by participants
- improve the quality of the workforce
- reduce welfare dependency
- enhance the productivity and competitiveness of New Mexico and the Nation

WCCNM consists of Board members appointed by the Chief Elected Officials (CEOs) of the four-county area comprised of Bernalillo, Sandoval, Valencia, and Torrance Counties. Client services are provided by One-Stop Career Centers in each County (see map).

As Fiscal and Administrative Agent, MRCOG will enable the WCCNM to operate effectively and efficiently, setting strategic goals and giving direction to establish policies and practices for an adept workforce investment system. These services also include the administrative support necessary to operate the WCCNM Youth Council.



MRCOG is providing board support, perform planning, providing technical assistance and training, performing monitoring, implementing an audit review, and assuring compliance with WIA reporting performance requirements. MRCOG is also establishing a financial system to monitor expenditures, document financial operations, coordinate the annual audit, and oversee One-Stop System cost allocation. MRCOG completed the transition of the program July 31, 2003, and currently has four full-time employees dedicated to the program. For additional information contact James Kloeppel, Workforce Administrator (jkloeppel@mrcog-nm.gov) at 505-247-1750.

## *Economic Development Summit Examines Innovative Strategies*

As part of our effort to promote economic development in central New Mexico, MRCOG joined with the Economic Development Administration of the U.S. Department of Commerce, the Washington D.C.-based Council on Competitiveness, and Albuquerque's Next Generation Economy, Inc. (NextGen), to host an economic development summit in Albuquerque on September 26, 2003. Over 150 participants from local governments, the business community, and academic institutions took part in the event.

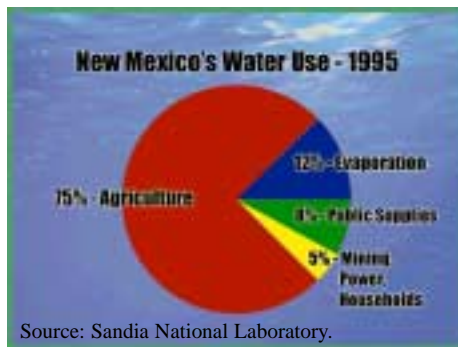
The summit, titled **"Creating Prosperity Through Innovation,"** studied this region's potential for creating business opportunities and high-paying jobs for New Mexicans through an innovation-based economic model. The summit capped off an intensive six-month study that included an analytical assessment of our "innovation environment" and identified three key issues for ongoing improvement. Participants in the day-long summit explored those issues and launched several ongoing action teams to address the key issues.

A Powerpoint presentation of the key findings of the study and the current state of the regional economy is available on the MRCOG website by navigating to [http://www.mrcog-nm.gov/powerpoint\\_presentations.htm](http://www.mrcog-nm.gov/powerpoint_presentations.htm).

Our local partners are developing a strategic plan around the summit and welcome the participation of all members of the MRCOG community. Please contact Maggie Hart at [mhart@mrcog-nm.gov](mailto:mhart@mrcog-nm.gov) for more information.

# Agriculture is Part of the Regional Economy

The Mid-Region is the most densely populated and developed area in the state of New Mexico. However, despite the increasing urbanization, this region has always valued its traditional agricultural economy consisting typically of small farms which produce crops and livestock for the local market. Since there is a significant market potential for locally-grown agricultural products, an Agribusiness Task Force was recently created by the Mid-Region Council of Governments to promote the economic viability of the region's agricultural sector. The Task Force is currently preparing a scope of work to seek funding for the development of an agribusiness information database for the Mid-Region. The database is intended to provide a compilation of up-to-date information that will seek to quantify the type, location and economic impact of agricultural activities. It will also serve as an inventory of producers, suppliers, and buyers of agricultural-related products in the Mid-Region. Of particular interest is a better understanding of the marketing and distribution process for local agricultural production.



The Task Force is also working on a list of goals and strategies, which are being continually revised and improved, in order to focus their efforts and provide guidance and direction. The goals of the Task Force currently include the following:

- Create an information base on local farming and ranching activities including agricultural industry structure and markets.
- Review land development policy to determine how it affects agribusiness.
- Increase public awareness of the local agricultural economy.
- Promote year-round production and development of an expanded range of products.
- Identify and seek funding to achieve the long-range goals of the Agribusiness Task Force.
- Establish an umbrella organization with oversight of agricultural programs and projects in the Mid-Region.

In order to promote innovations in agricultural technology and to improve year-round production of crops in regions such as the Mid-Region, Sandia National Laboratories (SNL) has become a participant on the Task Force. SNL has been working on water saving technology that would greatly reduce water usage for crops. New Mexico currently uses about 75% of its water for agriculture. The current drought situation demands more creative farming techniques that use water efficiently.

The water savings achieved by "Controlled Environment Agriculture," SNL's technique for growing hydroponic forage crops in greenhouses has been shown to use only 1/10 the water used in open field farming. SNL currently has greenhouses in Estancia and Mexico

that are growing hydroponic forage and showing these water savings. SNL is also improving greenhouse technology by developing specialized films for greenhouse surfaces that provide the exact light wavelength needed for ideal plant growth. Additionally, SNL believes that feed for animals and food for people grown in enclosed greenhouses can both save water and greatly reduce the vulnerability of these crops to a terrorist attack. The Agribusiness Task Force will continue to work with SNL on this very important issue.

For additional information on the Agribusiness Task Force contact Randall Falkner (rfalkner@mrcog-nm.gov) at 505-247-1750. ■

## Reception Honors New Mexico State Transportation Commission

A reception honoring the New Mexico State Transportation Commissioners was held on the evening of December 2 at the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center in Albuquerque in conjunction with a meeting of the State Transportation Commission on December 3, 2003. The reception was hosted by Bernalillo County, City of Albuquerque, MRCOG, and the Village of Los Ranchos de Albuquerque. Commissioners from five of the six districts were able to attend (see photo at far right). Also in attendance were Rhonda Faught, Secretary of the New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT), State and local elected officials, and transportation planning professionals. The commissioners were recognized for their commitment to improving transportation systems and safety in New Mexico.

*Rhonda Faught, Secretary of the NMDOT (at left), chats with Valencia County Commissioner Mary Andersen.*



*MRCOG Executive Director Lawrence Rael (above, third from left) honored Commissioners (from left) Bud Hettinga, Jim Franken, Norm Assed (fourth from left), Johnny Cope, and Greg Ortiz.*



---

## MRCOG LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES for the YEAR 2004 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

### *RECOGNITION AND SUPPORT OF REGIONAL COUNCILS*

#### **Policy: Support State funding for the seven State Planning & Development Districts.**

Background: The Local Government Division of the New Mexico Department of Finance and Administration currently funds each of the State's seven State Planning and Development Districts at an amount of \$53,457. We support continued funding and increases for the seven state Planning and Development Districts.

### *INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS*

#### **Policy: Oppose legislation that would restructure State revenue sources resulting in the loss of revenue to local government, including removal of the gross receipts tax on the sale of food.**

Background: During recent state Legislative sessions, bills have been introduced to create new deductions from the gross receipts and governmental gross receipts taxes. Such legislation would result in recurring losses that would have a devastating affect on the financial situation of local governments. Consequently, legislation should be opposed when it restructures revenue sources resulting in the loss of actual revenue to any local governments without compensating state or local taxing authority to offset revenue losses or hold harmless provisions to be paid from state resources.

### *TRANSPORTATION*

#### **Policy: Support dedicated funding for Regional Transit Districts.**

Background: In 2003, legislation was enacted to allow adjacent governmental units to join together to create regional transportation districts to develop and operate transit services across jurisdictional boundaries. The state recognized the need to allow the creation of organizations that can work effectively with local governmental units to provide effective transit services that support local and state policies. Transit services provided by a regional transit district will reflect the regional nature of transit service demands and ensure that elected officials from affected governmental units have the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process.

Effective transit services support local land use and economic development plans, assist in meeting federal air quality requirements, and provide vital transportation for individuals who cannot or do not drive. Both state and local funds will be needed for these public transit services. The MRCOG supports the use of state transportation funds for Regional Transit Districts and the authorization of transit-dedicated tax authority for local governments.

### *WATER*

#### **Policy: Support continued state funding for regional water planning efforts administered through the Interstate Stream Commission, specifically dealing with the implementation phase and future updates of the Middle Rio Grande and Estancia Basin Regional Water Plans.**

Background: Since 1988, the New Mexico Legislature has been providing funds on an annual basis to qualified regional water planning agencies. Significant work has been done statewide on regional water plans and the funding program needs to fund the implementation phase of the plans, future updates of the plans and water project funding. The MRCOG strongly encourage, due to limited initial funding, that the Legislature continue funding the regional planning effort on a state-wide basis, with special emphasis on funding implementation programs identified in the approved plans, and funding for updates of regional water plans. Legislation passed last legislation session now requires the regional water plans be integrated, where feasible, into the state water plan.

#### **Policy: Support legislation establishing a permanent funding mechanism and greater local government representation on the Water Trust Board.**

Background: A long-term permanent revenue source is needed to properly fund water and wastewater projects and manage the state's limited water resources. Presently, the funding process for the newly created Water Trust Board is based on yearly legislative appropriation and requires a long-term solution. In addition, of the fifteen members of the Water Trust Board only two represent counties and municipalities and MRCOG recommends more equitable representation for local governments.

#### **Policy: Support legislation and funding to adjudicate water rights for the Middle Rio Grande Basin within a reasonable time frame.**

Background: Water management policies and programs will effectively be hindered until an accurate accounting of who has the right to use what quantities of water and how they may use them. Although a statewide adjudication of water rights is necessary, the MRCOG supports funding to carry out a full adjudication process in the Middle Rio Grande Basin. The legislature should also use innovative approaches to enhance rapid resolution of adjudication issues.

### *STATE PROGRAMS*

#### **Policy: Urge the State to use existing regional service delivery systems wherever practical.**

Background: The state plays an important role in the funding of public services and programs administered at the regional and state level. The state should give consideration to which programs are implemented most appropriately at the local or regional level. State administration of federal programs can be problematic for local governments, as state agencies tend to be more removed from clients and less responsive to their needs. On the other hand, individual local governments may lack the resources to achieve the desired efficiencies and cost-effectiveness. Also, some programs, for example, transportation, air quality, homeland security, solid waste, and water management are most appropriately and effectively addressed at the regional level. The collaborative partnerships typical of regional approaches can provide the critical mass of users and clients for services and programs to be cost effective.

### *NM 528 Widening Completed*

Congratulations to the New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT), the City of Rio Rancho, and Intel Corporation for completion of the NM 528 reconstruction and widening project. These three entities participated in the funding for this effort, which provides much-needed congestion relief for the City of Rio Rancho and Intel employees. An early October ribbon-cutting ceremony officially unveiled the finished NM 528 reconstruction project for all to see.

### *Commuter Relief on Coors*

The termini for the Coors/I-40 study have been expanded to address neighborhood and local circulation concerns north and south of the Interstate on Coors Boulevard. The end result of this NMDOT-led work will be a design for a reconstructed interchange that will provide relief to commuters on the West Side while addressing the needs of the surrounding neighborhoods and businesses.

### *Ready... Set... WALK!*

Look for information about Walkable Community Workshops next spring, when MRCOG staff coordinates with local jurisdictions to co-host eight half-day sessions throughout the urban area. The workshops are sponsored by a grant from the National Center for Bicycling and Walking. They provide an opportunity to identify strategies that increase the number and viability of walking and bicycling opportunities in the urban area. The workshops also aim to enhance coordination between local jurisdictions in addressing critical pedestrian issues.



### *Transportation Planning Outside the Albuquerque Urban Area*

Special transportation studies are underway in the non-metropolitan portion of the MRCOG district. As part of the RPO (Regional Planning Organization) work program, a Valencia County Transportation Subcommittee is holding meetings to discuss transportation issues and develop recommendations for improving the transportation systems in the county. Also, the Jemez Valley Corridor Subcommittee is investigating the traffic problems associated with NM 4 from San Ysidro to Los Alamos County.

### *Cash from Congress for Airport Access*

Our Congressional delegation is providing Federal funds to the urban area for design and preliminary engineering work for the reconstruction of the I-40/West Central Interchange, and the road leading north from I-40 to the Double Eagle II Airport. The City of Albuquerque Aviation Department and NMDOT are cooperating in this initial phase of the reconstruction effort, which is intended to provide better access to the economic development efforts underway at the Airport.

## Water News. . .

### *Water Plan Nears Completion*

After many years in development, the Regional Water Plan for the Middle Rio Grande area is scheduled for completion in December. This Plan will be presented for acceptance to all of the local governments in Sandoval, Bernalillo, and Valencia Counties. The Regional Water Plan is available at the MRCOG offices or can be viewed and downloaded from the website of the Middle Rio Grande Water Assembly at ([www.WaterAssembly.org](http://www.WaterAssembly.org)).

## *Congratulations to MRCOG Regional Award Recipients*

On August 8, 2003, MRCOG held its 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Awards Presentation and Dinner. The dinner was held at the Hyatt Tamaya Resort located on the beautiful Santa Ana Pueblo. "This is an exciting event that enables representatives from all municipalities to come together and share in each others successes," stated Lawrence Rael, MRCOG Executive Director. Congratulations to this year's award recipients.

Public/Private Partnership Award for the  
Albuquerque Baseball Stadium  
City of Albuquerque  
Albuquerque Baseball, LLC "Isotopes"

Public Partnership Award for  
Saving Casa San Ysidro - Corrales  
Village of Corrales  
City of Albuquerque  
City of Rio Rancho  
Town of Bernalillo  
Sandoval County

Regional Leadership Award  
Representative Dan P. Silva  
Senator Ben D. Altamirano

Community Leadership Award  
for the Jemez Springs Bath House  
Mayor John Garcia  
and the Village of Jemez Springs

Special Recognition Award  
Senator Richard Romero



Sandoval County Commissioner William Sapien, Pauline Eisenstadt of Corrales, Mayor Gary Kanin of Corrales, and Donna Wylie, Director of the Sandoval County Visitor Center accept their awards for work on behalf of Casa San Ysidro (left). Senator Richard Romero accepts his award from MRCOG Board Chair Mayor John Hooker of Los Ranchos de Albuquerque (above).





Mid-Region Council of Governments  
317 Commercial NE, Suite 104  
Albuquerque, NM 87102-3429

## Regional Transit District Taking Shape

With MRCOG providing guidance, a regional transit district (RTD) is taking shape in the Middle Rio Grande region. A recent MRCOG workshop brought together representatives from counties and municipalities in the region to discuss the requirements of the new RTD law. Action is now occurring to get the required formation process underway. MRCOG has hired Mr. Bruce Rizzieri ([brizzieri@mrcog-nm.gov](mailto:brizzieri@mrcog-nm.gov)) to spearhead the RTD effort and work with local governments to make sure all the law's requirements are met.

The law requires RTD participants to develop consensus on issues such as boundaries, governing board representation, and administrative structure. Once those decisions are made, a contract can be signed and submitted to the New Mexico Department of Transportation and the New Mexico Transportation Commission for RTD certification. The RTD can then begin functioning.

Many of the governments in the area have passed or are considering resolutions indicating their intent to participate in the RTD discussion. They have also indicated their desire for MRCOG to provide the leadership and staff support needed to organize the RTD. To date, the counties of Bernalillo and Sandoval; the cities of Albuquerque, Belen, and Rio Rancho; the town of Bernalillo; and the villages of Corrales, Los Lunas, Los Ranchos de Albuquerque, and Tijeras have passed such resolutions. We look forward to working with the governments in the MRCOG area to realize the benefits of a regional approach to transit in this area.



MRCOG's **VIEWS**

Fall 2003, Volume 1, Issue 3

A Quarterly Newsletter of the Mid-Region Council of Governments